
FACTSHEET

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Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource
Operations

Drought affects your well

VICTORIA – Private well owners and water suppliers using wells are being urged to continue to conserve water as dry conditions persist on Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, the South Coast, and across the Southern Interior and the Kootenays.

Information from the network of provincial observation wells operated by the Province suggests that people should be cautious with their well water supplies. Many observation wells are showing lower than normal groundwater levels earlier in the season than in previous years.

Groundwater levels naturally vary on a seasonal basis, and are affected by the amount of “recharge” that the aquifer receives during the wet season, as well as the pumping of wells that extract water from the aquifer. Water levels in wells are affected by natural seasonal water table levels, the depth of the well, the proximity to and relative depth of other nearby wells, and the amount of groundwater use in the area. Shallow aquifers, including aquifers that are interconnected with surface streams, and fractured bedrock aquifers in upland areas are expected to be more immediately affected by this year’s drought than deeper, broader aquifers.

Groundwater and surface water are generally interconnected, and drawing down water in wells may cause water levels in neighbouring streams to drop as well, potentially impacting ecosystems and other water users.

In coastal areas, excessive drawdown of groundwater levels can increase the risk of saltwater intrusion as ocean water filters inland to replace the freshwater that has been extracted from the well. Users of affected wells may note an increase in salty taste of the water. Because saltwater intrusion can cause long-term or permanent changes to freshwater aquifers, well operators and residents should decrease or discontinue use of affected wells until conditions improve with autumn rains.

In cases where wells are at risk of running out of water, well users should put contingency plans in place before water shortages occur, including the identification of alternate water sources. This may include the purchase of water from bulk water hauling companies.

A well should not be used to store hauled water. Cisterns or water storage tanks are available to buy or rent. Well users are encouraged to follow water conservation practices that are consistent with local government’s restrictions and the provincial drought level rating.

Staff from the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations continue to work with regional health authorities, municipal and regional governments to monitor and evaluate water supplies.

Quick facts:

- There are about 100,000 wells in the province, of which 80,000 are domestic and 20,000 used by municipalities, agriculture and industry.

Learn more:

B.C. Drought Information: <http://www.livingwatersmart.ca/drought/>

Groundwater levels in provincial observation wells:

http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wsd/data_searches/obswell/map/obsWells.html

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